

Report of a Primary Inspection

St Peter's Primary School, Belfast

October 2024



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1. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

St Peter's Primary School is a co-educational, maintained primary school in West Belfast. There are 290 children attending the school, all of whom come from the local area. Seventy percent of the children have free-school meals entitlement. Twenty-one percent of the children have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN); 21 of whom have a statement of SEN. There are 19 newcomer children in the school. A Specialist Provisions in Mainstream Schools (SPiMS) class for children with severe learning difficulties was established in September 2024; however, at the time of the inspection the building work for the classroom was not complete. As a result, the children in the SPiMS class were attending for only part of the school day.

St Peter's Primary School has a well-established shared education partnership with a controlled school.

B. VIEWS OF PARENTS, LEARNERS AND STAFF

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) issued online confidential questionnaires to year 7 children, all staff and parents in advance of the inspection.

All of the children in year 7 completed the questionnaire and the majority of their responses were positive. Almost all of the children agreed that they can talk to someone in school if they are worried or have a problem and a majority agreed that the school encourages them to eat healthily and exercise daily. There were a small number of written comments where the children highlighted their enjoyment of curricular areas of learning such as The World Around Us, the Arts and Physical Education (PE). In focused and incidental discussions with children throughout the school, they said that they feel safe in school, they are proud of their achievements, and value the support and encouragement of their teachers and classroom assistants.

Twelve percent of the parents responded to the questionnaire and their responses were positive about the good progress that their child is making in their learning. Almost all agreed that the staff have explained how they can help their child with their learning. They all know about the school vision and how to raise a safeguarding concern. In written responses, the parents were very positive about the staff and principal, in particular about their willingness to listen and provide support and that they have the best interests of the children at heart.

Almost all of the teaching and non-teaching staff responded to the questionnaires. All were positive about the school vision and their contribution to achieving it. In written comments they spoke positively about the supportive relationships in the school and their pride in being a member of the school community.

A summary of the questionnaire responses, including the issues raised, was shared with the principal and the chair of the board of governors.

C. THE PROCESS OF INSPECTION

The ETI worked alongside St Peter's Primary School to consider how well the school:

- has identified and articulates its vision;
- prioritises actions to achieve the vision;
- overcomes the main challenges it faces;
- monitors and reviews progression to identify, celebrate and embed success; and
- grows and develops an inclusive community of learning.

2. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- The vision in St Peter's Primary school is lived out in the inclusive community where the children are 'happy, safe and secure'; the staff provide the children with a calm and purposeful environment in which to learn.
- The school's well-developed self-evaluation procedures have been used effectively to identify appropriate areas for development.
- The recent focus on the development of children's digital story telling and writing skills has inspired the children to have a love of creative writing where they can use well their imaginations and expand their use of descriptive language.
- The World Around Us (WAU) curriculum has been enhanced, with an increased number of trips and visits which broaden the children's perspectives, provide experiential learning opportunities and introduce them to potential career paths.
- The emotional health and wellbeing of the children is promoted very effectively by a wide range of strategies at individual and whole-school level which support the children's readiness to learn.
- The staff have a clear understanding and oversight of the barriers to learning faced by some of the children and have put in place very effective strategies to ensure the children make good progress, experience success and integrate fully into their class.
- The children's behaviours for learning are exemplary; they are respectful, polite, work well independently, and are being afforded opportunities to develop their confidence. Their successes are well-celebrated throughout the school.

- Importance is placed on staff professional learning. This is evident in the enthusiasm among teachers and classroom assistants who are proactive in seeking opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge in order to be responsive to the current school priorities and the everchanging needs of the children.
- At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

Areas for consideration:

- to re-establish the opportunities for teachers to share effective practice, reflect on their own pedagogy, and promote active and creative learning approaches to develop the children's oracy and thinking skills; and
- to maximise the impact of the school's action planning processes by the co-ordinators working collaboratively to address the school's key priorities.

3. MAIN REPORT

A. SETTING THE VISION

The vision in St Peter's Primary School is clearly understood by the parents, staff and governors and is central to the work of the school. The staff and governors have established an inclusive community where the children are 'happy, safe and secure'. The values of kindness, generosity and forgiveness are evident in all classes and, throughout the school, the children learn in an atmosphere of purpose, calmness and contentment. The school's vision was last reviewed in 2017, and the leadership have plans in place to review it. When doing so, they plan to seek and include the views of the children and ensure the use of more child-friendly language.

There is an interim school development plan in place which outlines appropriate priorities for development. In recent years there had been a focus on developing the children's talking and listening skills and the children's engagement in creative writing. The success of the work on developing creative writing is clearly evident in the children's positive attitudes to writing and their growing use of descriptive and expressive language. Through the school's self-evaluation processes, the staff have now identified a need to develop the children's oracy skills across the curriculum. The middle leaders have separate action plans in place to develop the children's oracy across each area of learning. They would benefit from working collaboratively and strategically to create a shared improvement plan for oracy focused on the holistic development of the children's oracy across the curriculum with clear targets through which they can measure the impact of the improvement work.

The leadership are re-establishing the full range of monitoring and evaluation procedures within the school and, in doing so, are considering how to make them manageable, efficient and effective. The governors are very supportive of the work of the staff and are highly visible in the school. There are well established means by which the parents can engage with the governors, so that the governors can respond promptly to any concerns raised. The governors place a high priority on the wellbeing of the staff and in celebrating the achievements of the children.

B. IMPLEMENTING AND IMPROVING TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

Respectful relationships, well-established routines and affirming interactions create a positive learning environment for all children where they feel "safe, special and valued." The staff know the children very well, evidenced by their detailed observations of the children's learning and the assessment information which they use to inform the planning. Planning, teaching and assessment is mostly effective. In the most effective practice observed, the staff model language well and ask open-ended questions to encourage the children's extended responses.

In recent years, the staff have made significant progress in integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) across the curriculum. They have developed effectively the children's digital storytelling skills and have deepened the children's understanding of the framework of a story. By focusing on the development of children's presenting, publishing and writing skills, the staff have fostered an increased interest in and enjoyment of writing across the school. The children's work, displayed in the classrooms and shared spaces, showcases their improving writing skills and imaginative language, and their creativity. In discussions with children, they spoke of their enthusiasm for writing and how they love using their imagination and technology to create characters and write stories. They also enjoy engaging in creative projects including digital coding, and online research, and they are aware of the essential skills that they are developing to enable them to be responsible digital citizens.

The staff have reviewed recently the topics and themes taught within the World Around Us (WAU) to ensure there is a balanced programme across the school. They have accessed a science bursary for resources and identified professional learning opportunities to increase further staff confidence in using scientific investigation to develop the children's scientific enquiry skills. The WAU curriculum has been enhanced with an increased number of trips and visits to broaden the children's perspectives, provide experiential learning opportunities, and introduce them to potential career paths.

The staff plan appropriately to build further on the work already begun in literacy and WAU, in order to develop the children's creativity and thinking skills across the curriculum through the use of a wider range of active learning and teaching approaches and problem-solving opportunities, particularly in numeracy.

The emotional health and wellbeing of the children is supported very effectively by the school. The school values the role that sport can play in promoting wellbeing, developing resilience and in creating a purposeful recreational outlet within and beyond the primary school years. The staff work closely with a range of external coaches to provide a programme of varied games and after-schools sports that develops the children's physical skills, promotes their participation in team games, and fosters co-operative play and a sense of achievement. Widening the physical education programme to incorporate dance and gymnastics more fully would benefit the children.

The health and wellbeing of the children is also promoted during a number of themed 'wellbeing weeks' including 'Catholic Schools' Week'. The staff use their observations of the children and engagement with their families, alongside information gathered from pupil attitude surveys and outside agencies, to monitor the children's wellbeing and provide support, where appropriate, through a range of therapy programmes and the services provided by the school counsellor. The school also actively promotes healthy eating at break and dinner times through its taught programme and school routines. The children who spoke with inspectors reported that they feel safe in school, understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and know who to turn to for support when they need it. They have a clear sense of pride in belonging to the St Peter's Primary School community.

C. BUILDING EQUITY

Staff show commitment to the school's inclusive ethos in their engagements with the children and have a clear oversight of the barriers to learning faced by some of the children. The children with SEN are well integrated into their classes. The recent staff training on developing Personal Learning Plans for children with SEN has resulted in well-considered targets on the plans which, in many cases, focus appropriately on developing the children as confident communicators. They also incorporate the views of the parents and children. As a result, the needs and interests of the children are considered, and their progress is monitored from their individual starting points. There are also bespoke plans in place to support the successful integration and learning of newcomer children and their progress is monitored carefully.

There is a wide range of interventions in place throughout the school, including in the newly established SPiMS class to support the needs of the children. The staff have a clear understanding of how the social and emotional wellbeing needs of the children can impact on their readiness to learn; assessments are used to monitor and evaluate the children's attitudes to school and to their learning.

Throughout the school, positive behaviour is promoted and supported very well by strategies, such as, regular 'brain breaks', the use of 'calm corners' and well-established class routines, and regular and consistent use of whole-class strategies to support the children in managing their emotions and behaviours. The use of sensory rooms, movement breaks and 'Theraplay' sessions outside of the classroom also provide effective opportunities to support children with managing emotions. As a result, the children are coping well with the routines in school; almost all are attentive and on task during their lessons and they engage well with their teachers and classroom assistants.

The classroom assistants are dedicated to supporting the children and know that they play a very important role within the school. They care about the children's emotional wellbeing and work unobtrusively to support them to manage their emotions and engage fully with their learning. The classroom assistants work closely with the class teachers and are respected and valued as part of the team.

D. DEFINING, CELEBRATING AND EMBEDDING SUCCESS

The children's behaviours for learning are exemplary; they are respectful, work well independently and are being afforded good opportunities to develop their confidence. The children who find working with others challenging are provided with appropriate self-management strategies to manage their emotions and successfully re-engage in their learning. The staff know the children well and take each child from their individual starting point.

The wider efforts and achievements of the children are celebrated on a daily basis with affirming and encouraging verbal and written comments and a wide range of awards. Every child has a piece of work on display throughout the school. The children report that they feel proud when their work is displayed and when, during whole school assembly, their progress is acknowledged and celebrated by all the other children. The children bring in news and awards that reflect their successes outside of school so that it can be celebrated with their friends and publicised more widely via the school's communication app. The children eagerly praise each other on a regular basis and recognise the successes of their peers.

The staff analyse effectively a range of information to monitor the children's progress from their individual starting points across key curricular areas. They set targets, monitor the children's outcomes and plan the next steps in the children's learning. The teachers' marking for improvement in the children's work is formative and supportive. The children know the progress they are making and are appreciative of the feedback from their teachers to help them improve their work. They are encouraged to self-correct, to take risks in their learning, building resilience and seeing mistakes as a learning opportunity.

The children are able to engage in research and to ask questions through their work in the WAU and can select and record information. When given the opportunity, particularly in their narrative writing, the children are developing their creativity.

Attendance is monitored carefully, and the pastoral team have strategies in place to work with parents and encourage them to prioritise the children's regular attendance at school. The school operates an open-door policy, and the senior leaders, governors and school counsellor are visible and accessible for parents who need support. The school acknowledges the need to continue with its work to improve attendance in the school.

The children in key stage 2, including those who have been identified as having SEN, have good opportunities to take on purposeful roles of responsibility and leadership as playground or breakfast club buddies, sports ambassadors, school counsellors, prefects, and head boy and girl. The children carry out their roles with a sense of pride and diligence and, in discussions with us, the children appreciate the important opportunities the roles give them to support the younger children and to contribute positively to the school community. In addition to using a commercial questionnaire with the children in key stage 1 and 2, the staff have developed their own approach for children in the foundation stage to assess their attitudes to self,

school and their learning. The results are used as a tool to identify attitudes and dispositions that may be a barrier to learning and plans are put in place to address issues that arise; the children are re-assessed at regular intervals to monitor the impact of the interventions. The school's own data indicates the success of these actions in recent years.

E. GROWING A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

St Peter's Primary School sits at the heart of the local community. The relationships between staff and the children are encouraging, supportive and conducive to building a successful community of learning. There is a culture of support and trust among all of the staff and a willingness to learn from each other and share practice. This is summed up in the message composed by the staff and governors together and displayed throughout the school, "Every member of staff shares the responsibility for encouraging mutual respect and supporting the professional development of colleagues." Going forward it will be important to re-establish the opportunities for teachers to observe each other's practice, to reflect on their own pedagogy and promote active and creative learning approaches to develop the children's oracy and thinking skills.

There are well-established links with local sports clubs which enhance the range of after-school sport activities provided for the children, and the aspect of games within Physical Education.

A key element of the school's work with the local community is to support the children's learning. Through the Full-Service Community Network (managed by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and funded by the Department of Education), the 'Ready for Anything' programme was delivered to year 3 children to develop their resilience skills, allowing them to deal with life's challenges safely and positively. The staff used the connection with a local pharmacy to promote the 'Pharmacy First' service through which they engaged in professional learning and accessed activities and ideas to develop the children's understanding of the role of the pharmacist. The school has a long-standing link with a local credit union to help the children to understand the importance of financial management.

Raising the children's aspirations is of significant importance and the wide range of educational visits provides them with experiences outside of the local community and are used to highlight the opportunities across a range of careers.

The links with the local pre-schools ensure a well-managed transition for the children coming into year 1. The teachers visit the pre-schools throughout the year and get to know the children, their interests and needs before they come to the school. There are also good links with local post-primary schools to support children's successful transition into year 8. The school hosts students from the secondary schools for work placements and is a hub school for first year student teachers in St Mary's College who come to observe teaching and teach religion lessons.

There is a commitment and value placed on professional learning within the school. The teachers embrace and are enthusiastic about opportunities for professional learning and are proactive in seeking out their own professional learning opportunities in addition to those provided by the school. Professional learning for all staff underpins the current priorities set out in the school's development plan.

The school is a member of the West Belfast Partnership Board; this provides good opportunities for the literacy, numeracy and ICT co-ordinators to attend cluster groups to share good practice, which included recently the sharing of the school's successful approach to improving creative writing.

F. CHILD PROTECTION

At the time of the inspection, the evidence provided by the school demonstrates that the arrangements for child protection align to the current statutory guidance.

4. GOING FORWARD

In line with its vision and ethos, St Peter's Primary School provides the children with a productive, calm and positive learning environment where each child can feel safe and special and know that they are a valued member of the school community with a positive contribution to make.

ETI, through the work of the District Inspector, will monitor the progress of St Peter's Primary School in addressing the areas for consideration as laid out in this report.

5. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: QUANTITATIVE TERMS

In this report, proportions may be described as percentages, common fractions and in more general quantitative terms. Where more general terms are used, they should be interpreted as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Almost/nearly all | - more than 90% |
| Most | - 75% - 90% |
| A majority | - 50% - 74% |
| A significant minority | - 30% - 49% |
| A minority | - 10% - 29% |
| Very few/a small number | - less than 10% |

The Education and Training Inspectorate

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